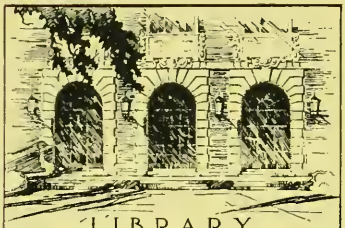

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A CHARGE,

&c.

THE CASE OF OBEDIENCE TO RULERS IN THINGS INDIFFERENT:

AND

THE POWER OF THE OFFERTORY AS A MEANS OF CHURCH EXTENSION,

BRIEFLY CONSIDERED, IN

A CHARGE

DELIVERED TO

THE CLERGY OF THE ARCHDEACONRY OF LONDON,

ON MAY 18, 1843.

BY THE VEN.

WILLIAM HALE HALE, M.A.

ARCHDEACON OF LONDON.

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1843.

A CHARGE,

&c.

Reverend Brethren,

I might appear to be wanting in respect to the Clergy of this Archdeaconry, were I to permit this, the first annual synod at which I have presided, to be dissolved, without my addressing to the assembled Clergy some topic for consideration, or offering to them some word of advice. At the same time, when it is borne in mind how few months have elapsed since the Lord Bishop of the Diocese held his Visitation, and how fully he pronounced his formal and deliberate judgment upon several points both of Doctrine and of Discipline, to which the attention of the Church has of late years been directed, I think the Clergy here present will concur with me in opinion, that I shall act most prudently in avoiding, as far as possible, those doctrinal questions which were so fully resolved by his Lordship, and which still are matter of discussion both in public and in private. I am the more induced to do so, because though the Clergy of an Archdeaconry

are generally ready to receive from their Archdeacon the word of exhortation, I consider it to be no part of my office to define controverted doctrines, or to determine authoritatively whether rites and ceremonies, which have become obsolete or have been neglected, are or are not to be revived. Such authority belongs to the Episcopal office, and to that alone. Add to this, that when I look around me, and observe in how bitter a spirit many controversies are now being carried on; what a tendency there is to substitute names for argument; and how the terms of heretic, or schismatic, or papist, are bandied to and fro; and how charity is almost forgotten in contention for the faith, I perhaps too willingly keep aloof from such contests, and would entreat both parties to consider whether, after all, they have not one common object in view, and whether it be not possible that, under the widest difference of expression, they may not intend to declare and to defend the same thing. Many good and pious people are alarmed at the aspect of the times, and fearful of the consequences which may follow from dissensions within the pale of our own Communion, as if the truth itself were likely to perish, and spiritual darkness were about once more to overspread the earth. But though it be true, as the Apostle James declares, that all wars and fighting are the offspring of a carnal principle, so that even in our contentions in behalf of what we hold to be truth, we are oftentimes unwittingly the slaves of prejudice,

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secretly influenced by envy, and too often more eager for the renown of victory, than really desirous to be freed from the necessity of contest, it must, however, never be forgotten, that in the mysterious order of God's providence, it is out of evil that good is wrought; and indeed it may be fairly questioned, whether as adversity, and pain, and trouble, are necessary exercises to fit the soul of man for the due perception of that which tends to its highest good, so also disputes about the truth are not also necessary to draw forth the energies of the Church, to excite inquiry, to create interest in behalf of truth itself, and that desire for its preservation and advancement which might lie dormant, or become enervated and lifeless, were it not awakened to exertion by the apprehension of impending danger. So that if the blood of martyrs be the seed of the Church, the prevalence of heresies may be a means, under God, of establishing, confirming, and extending the knowledge of the faith. For what especial end it may have pleased the great Head of the Church, that controversies which have almost slept for two centuries should once more be rife, it would be vanity to conjecture, and arrogance to predict; let us be assured, that out of these discordant elements God can and will produce fertility and peace, provided that we really seek peace and ensue it, and pray for it, tempering our zeal by that charity which suffereth long, and is kind, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

I shall forbear to make any further comments upon the general aspect of the times, or to touch upon any controversies relating to doctrine. But since the office which I have the honour to hold is, in the present state of the administration of the Ecclesiastical law, almost wholly conversant about the temporal matters of the Church, and outward customs, the due administration and observation of which it is the duty of the Archdeacon to superintend and maintain, it may not be out of place to allude to feelings and principles, which have been called into action by certain Injunctions and Counsels, respecting the mode of performing the public services, which have been delivered by our Diocesan, both publicly and privately, to his Clergy.

That the Ordinary has a right generally to require of his Clergy an exact observance of the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, no one here present is, I imagine, willing to deny. But then a question arises, as to what the Ordinary may lawfully require in cases where possibly a Rubric has never been observed, or has become from whatever cause obsolete. I will not conceal my own opinion, that the more perfectly obsolete any law which happens to be of a positive nature has become, the less justified is any private man in undertaking to revive obedience to it; and that the more importance he attaches to the observance, the more incumbent it is upon

him not to make the attempt, without first obtaining the sanction and permission of those whose business it is to superintend the execution of laws. On the other hand, it appears to me, that when they who have public authority to enforce laws think proper to do so, it is no due justification of disobedience to plead that the law is obsolete; neither have we a right to think the command to obey that law unjust, merely because obedience to that law has not been before required. Whatever our individual opinion may be, as to the convenience or inconvenience of the revival of what is fallen into desuetude, it is our duty to comply with the command of our superiors silently and respectfully, if not cheerfully. What though we think the proceeding of our superior to be erroneous, surely public opposition is a greater error still; an error against duty, and also against prudence; as shutting out, for the time at least, the opportunity of reconsideration of the command, and almost producing a necessity of enforcing it. Whereas if we patiently submit, one of several consequences must inevitably follow; either the practice enjoined is found useful, in which case we must take shame to ourselves for our wrong opinion of its effect; or the practice is found harmless, in which case we shall have vexed ourselves and others without cause; or it is proved to be hurtful, in which case it is scarcely possible to conceive, that any of those who have the rule over us in the Church would not be

ready at the same time to relax the command, and to acknowledge the conduct of those as most praiseworthy, who, yielding for a while their own judgments to that of their superior, have given the proposed measure a fair and faithful trial.

It may, however, be said, we would sacrifice our own feelings, but the feelings of our congregation are also to be considered, and we must be cautious above all things of not giving offence to weak brethren. We would wear a surplice, or read this or that prayer, but that our people are alarmed, and think that Popery and Superstition are making advances amongst us. Allow me, Reverend Brethren, to discuss briefly this case of conscience, and to suggest the course which any one who finds himself in this dilemma appears to be bound to follow. In the first place, it would be his duty to remember, that admitting his view of the case, as regards the people committed to his care, to be correct, he has before him only the choice of scandal; whether by his obedience to a lawful command the congregation shall be scandalized, or by his disobedience the Church at large be scandalized, and others tempted to follow his example of disobedience. Permit me further to observe, what great prudence there is in such circumstances, in distrusting to a certain degree our own impressions; and how liable we are, when we disapprove any thing, to fancy that the dislike which others have to it is fully as strong as our own; and thus to strengthen our-

selves in error, by the very prevalence of error in others. The result of which consideration will be this; that it being certain, that disobedience to a lawful command in things indifferent is a sin; and it being somewhat more than probable, that the judgment of our superior, given under a full sense of his own personal responsibility, and after mature deliberation, is better than our own; it becomes our duty not only cheerfully to comply with it, but also to endeavour to persuade others to a patient submission, and to permit the trial to be made, whether the things enjoined by the superior be not, as he believes them to be, on the whole conducive to piety and order, and tending to the general welfare of God's people. O! what mutual affection and good-will would be produced by such a line of conduct! what truly Christian meekness on the part of those subject to authority! what forbearance on the part of those who have to command! Surely no governor, whether he be prince or prelate, statesman or soldier, parent or master, is so likely to be cautious what he enjoins to be done, as he who finds in the persons subject to his command men resembling the soldiers of the centurion, ready instantly to obey.

You will have understood, that in these observations I have had in mind the directions which have been given by our Diocesan, relative to the announcement of the singing Psalms by the Minister; the collection of alms at the Offertory; the reading of

the prayer for the Church militant; and the advice not to put off the Surplice at Morning Prayer, if it is obliged to be resumed for the conclusion of the service after the sermon is ended. I have endeavoured, with all due respect to those here assembled, to state with reference to the case of a difference of opinion on certain matters, between the governor and the governed, how it is our duty to act. With regard to the Injunctions themselves, needless and improper as it would be that I should attempt to act the part of an apologist for his lordship's proceedings, still it is but justice to declare, that no one thing has been enjoined, without his having had proof, derived from experience, of its propriety, efficacy, and utility. Nor, it may be added, without his having been required by individual Clergymen of the Diocese to declare his sentiments upon the points in question. Let it be recollected, that what is new here may be already old elsewhere, that the custom which is lost in one place may not only have been retained in another, but be giving proof that its presence is a real blessing, its absence, though unregretted, a positive loss of good.

I have said enough with relation to a state of feeling amongst us which is, I hope, transient; and about the extent of which we every one of us must form different views, according to the varied condition and feeling of the parish, or society, or neighbourhood in which we live, or into which we may happen to be casually thrown; and I must proceed to

state to you what my own views are, with regard to the power of the Offertory, as a means of promoting union in the Church throughout the kingdom, and of meeting in some degree the exigencies created by the rapid increase of population, and the concentration of large masses of people. One advantage must immediately follow from the restoration of the use of the prayer for the Church militant,—namely, the drawing attention to the Offertory which precedes it; and when we consider what a spirit of liberality and of love towards our Church has of late been engendered amongst the highest and wealthiest orders of the community, it is not unreasonable to expect that, should the same spirit continue to prevail, the proposal for a weekly Offertory will not fail in the course of a few years to be heartily received. Why should the opportunity of giving alms in the solemn manner prescribed in that service be the privilege only of those who receive the Holy Sacrament? Why are the poor, the clergy, and the Church at large, not permitted to receive the gifts of any but communicants? It is but a very few years since, when, at the consecration of a new Church in this City, it fell to my lot, as the Chaplain of the Bishop, to read all the sentences of the Offertory. It was probably the first time for centuries that the whole of the sentences had been so read; and I shall never forget the breathless attention with which the congregation then heard those impressive exhortations, which inculcate upon the people the necessity and

duty of contributing to the maintenance of the Clergy; but which, from a sense of delicacy, and from zeal for the relief of the poor, are not read by us to the people. Indeed, so universally are they omitted, that there is reason to think, that amongst those who habitually receive the Holy Communion, many persons might be found who have never read the whole of these sentences, and who know not that it is a part of the ancient discipline of our Church, that they who wait at the Altar should be partakers with the Altar[1].

Let us calculate what the amount of the money collected would be, were it an established custom that every person who went to Church on the Lord's day should give a single penny. If on the average we might reckon on 240 pence from each Church, such a contribution would produce 10,000*l.* per week, and more than half a million per year. It is, I imagine, by some such system as this, that the im-

[1] I am inclined to believe, that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, either the Clergy actually took to themselves a portion of the offertory money, or that some design was contemplated for enabling them to enjoy that privilege as a means of support. This may be gathered from some MS. notes of business, apparently intended to be sped in the Convocation, and which are inserted at the end of a Prayer-Book which is in the British Museum, (MS. Harl. No. 7311.) said to have belonged to Bishop Andrews; amongst various other matters, allusion being made to the separation at the offertory, of the gifts intended for the Clergy from the alms destined for the use of the poor.

mense sums are collected, as I am informed, in the South of France, and in other Roman Catholic states, which, if report be true, are employed in building Roman Catholic Chapels in this country, and in extending the dominion of the Church of Rome in America. We can hardly hope that any of us should live to see the day, when by the united contributions of our church-going population so large a sum will be collected by the simplest means, unfelt as a burden by any, and accepted by the poorest, as a privilege similar to that which drew from the Saviour himself his blessing, when he beheld the widow's mite cast into the offerings of God; still it may advance the measure, by God's blessing, to speak of it thus openly. It often helps to bring forth power, to have it known what power exists; and I hail with delight the examples of weekly offertories which have, in this instance, been so nobly set by a few poor country parishes; and I sympathize most cordially with those who have written upon this subject; and I pray God to put it into the hearts of our rulers to watch these symptoms of rising energy in the Church, and to cherish the holy zeal which has prompted a few members of our communion to the fulfilment of the apostolic direction of laying by something for God's service at the end of each week; and which has taught them to apply to themselves the precept of the Law of Moses, not to appear before the Lord empty. Consider, I beseech you, what vast good might be

effected, were half a million of money per year to be thus collected, placed at the disposal of the Bishops, and laid out for the welfare of the whole Church. What provision might not be made for superannuated clergymen, their widows and children, how many churches might be built, how many almshouses for the poor, how many schools. Consider how easy it would be to send forth Bishops to our colonies, and to found new Sees in every quarter of the world; and let me add, how many Deacons might be employed at home in the service of the Church; nay more, the Colonial Churches and clergy would not, as now, be liable to the severest privations, from the deficiency of the funds of the venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel; there would be ample means to meet their wants; and what is of the highest importance, the very example, thus set by the Church at home, would teach the Church in the Colonies abroad the duty and the method of self-support; not indeed by the members of each parish or district contributing weekly for the support of a particular minister, thus exposing him and themselves to the miserable consequences of capricious attachment, but by a contribution to the common Church Fund distributed by the Bishop to every part of the diocese, the wealthier part of the Colony contributing to the support of the poorer, and the more populous districts aiding those more thinly inhabited. When a Church is either destitute of fixed endowment, or when, as is the case with the Church in our country,

the endowment is limited, and the demand for an additional number of Bishops, and of Presbyters, and Deacons daily increases, scarcely any alternative is left open to us, but that of reverting to primitive and early usage, the creation of a common fund by the alms of the whole body of Christians. If thousands of people be every year added to the Church by baptism, the very addition of the number ought and might, under a regular discipline to that end, provide an adequate number of clergy for their spiritual instruction. But I must desist from pressing this topic upon your notice at greater length; only let me ask you to consider with yourselves, not so much the probability of such a system of Church contribution being established, as the efficacy of it; and, if you feel that there is force and truth in the principles of union which I have suggested, join me in prayer to God that in his own good time He may bring these desires to good effect.

Intimately connected with this subject is that of the Pastoral Letter recently addressed to the clergy and people of this diocese, recommending a united contribution from them for the purpose of establishing the Church in our new settlement on the coast of China. Let not cold calculation damp this effort to offer some recompense to a brave but heathen people, inferior indeed to us in arms, but scarcely inferior in civilization and in arts, for all the injuries and sufferings inflicted upon myriads of our fellow-creatures, in a war which, humanly speaking, has

ended gloriously, but the justice and necessity of which, to say the least, appears to be but doubtful. It may not be in the counsels of the Almighty to open the door of the Gospel to the inhabitants of the vast empire of China for ages to come; that is no just reason for delaying to plant the Church in its full integrity in our new colony. Let the Church at home make due exertion; and whether the State assist her or not, let it be her care henceforth, not to permit a single new colony to be founded, and all the Officers of government, of justice, and of revenue to be placed there, without founding at the same time an Episcopal see in the colony, and sending forth a Bishop to foster and protect our Church.

In what I have said, Reverend Brethren, I would hope that I have not appeared to take more upon me in the way of advice, and in the expression of my opinion, than might be expected on the occasion of my first meeting the Clergy of this Archdeaconry. The truth is, that though new in the character of your Archdeacon, I feel that I am really addressing myself to those who have known me during the whole period of my ministry in the Church, with whom I have been accustomed almost daily to act and to converse, and who would be authorized to consider themselves not treated either kindly or respectfully, if I assumed to them the manner of a stranger, or expressed myself as doubting their readiness to support and assist me in the discharge of my duty. It is not with any feeling of arrogance,

but with real thankfulness, that I express the opinion, that few of my predecessors have entered upon this arduous office with equal advantage, known as I am already to most of the Clergy, and, which is not the least gratifying circumstance, my truly venerable predecessor having himself made way for my advancement; thus giving me assurance, that if I imitate him in steady consistency of principle, in earnest endeavour to promote the welfare of the Church, and in his kindness to all with whom he has been connected; as I have succeeded him in office, I shall also, in due course of time, succeed him in that place which he occupies in the hearts and affections of the Clergy, and to which, by his meekness, and gentleness, and truly Christian deportment, he is so justly entitled.

THE END.

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